

winter 2008 newsletter

success stories



Hope and Healing

Building Connections Through Horseback Riding

Children in our Family Reception Center (FRC) program now participate in an activity available to very few city kids – regular horseback riding. The FRC has teamed up with GALLOP NYC and a generous financial sponsor to create The Pony Club, which provides therapeutic horseback riding. The Pony Club is the brainchild of Susannah Gersten, a social worker at this community-based family counseling program in Park Slope, Brooklyn. Susannah wrote her MSW thesis on animal-assisted therapy, and when GALLOP (Giving Alternative Learners Uplifting Opportunities) created a therapeutic riding center at the Kensington Stables near Prospect Park, she immediately proposed partnering with them.

Therapeutic horseback riding, one of the oldest forms of animal-assisted therapy, helps youth with emotional problems to build self-esteem, increase feelings of empathy, and decrease levels of anger and stress. The physical contact with the horses is also very helpful for children with issues around touching and being touched. FRC workers targeted children between the ages of eight and eleven who have difficulty opening up in counseling. “Some of the children who participate have started revealing things they wouldn’t talk about before,” says Susannah, “They do it indirectly, but it’s very obvious – you ask them how the horse is feeling today, and they tell you how they’re feeling.”

The Pony Club meets weekly, with a GALLOP riding instructor and five horses. “The instructor is very supportive and in tune with what everyone needs,” says Case Worker Julianna Berggren, who helps Susannah coordinate the program, “And the horses respond very positively to the kids. It’s been beautiful to watch the relationship between them grow.” One participating girl owns a figurine that resembles her favorite horse at the stable, and she reports that just looking

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

Good Shepherd has many different programs but the common thread uniting them all is our mission to help vulnerable children, youth and their families make a safe passage to self-sufficiency. Whether we are providing after-school centers, family counseling, foster care or housing for young adults, we help our program participants build strong connections to their families and other caring adults, to their schools and to their communities because we know that this is critical to their healthy development. By creating a sense of belonging, we are able to build the foundation from which our young people are able to overcome challenges, embrace new opportunities and tap into their enormous potential. Our competent and caring staff are vital to the process but they do not accomplish this work alone. We turn to others to partner with us ... individuals like Richard Fields who remembered the strength of his connections to his elementary school and the opportunities it gave him to grow and feel empowered through the arts...like the generous donor who recognized the powerful role that horseback riding could play in the lives of emotionally fragile children... and the adoptive mothers who are working so closely to sustain the connections between siblings in a large family and to promote a new sense of belonging and strengthened relationships through adoption.

At this special time of year, when we honor family and relationships and look forward to new opportunities and connections on the horizon, we count on our many supporters to ensure that our program participants are able to experience a powerful sense of belonging and thus take steps toward a more hopeful future.

This newsletter comes with my best wishes to you and your loved ones for the holidays and for peace and health in the New Year.

Sincerely,

Arnette Lo Monaco

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The Arts Come Alive in a City School



Photo: Laura Dwight

Bronx native Richard Fields never forgot how special he felt after being given a clarinet and taught how to play in the fifth grade at CS 102. “I remember not only how excited I was about learning the clarinet,” he said, “but also just walking down the street with it and feeling like somebody.” Sadly, in recent years, budget cuts have made arts education increasingly unavailable in the New York City public schools. Fields, who as an adult built an extraordinary career as a gaming and resort

developer and is a longtime donor to Good Shepherd Services, wanted today’s youth to be able to have the same feeling, and decided to do something to make it happen. Since this fall, CS 102 boasts an impressive music and arts program deeply intertwined with the academic curriculum. Artists-in-Residence from DreamYard and Mind-Builders, two Bronx-based creative arts education organizations, are providing daytime instruction in theater, visual arts, and dance. The fourth-grade social studies

class is developing a play about early American history, and fifth graders are getting exercise while learning ballroom dance steps, including the foxtrot, tango and salsa. Nine-week cycles of afterschool programs offer instruction in visual arts, theater arts, music and dance, which will tie into school-day work. A workgroup chaired by Good Shepherd and the CS 102 Principal is also creating plans for further integration of arts education with regular classes.

“Richard and I talked for about a year, and we created the program under his inspiration,” says Jim Marley, Good Shepherd’s Assistant Executive Director for Bronx Community-Based Programs, “He really wanted to make the school a center for arts and music, and we ran with his idea.”

The after-school program offers several projects running concurrently. Work in the visual arts includes paint, watercolors, stencils and fine hand work, and dancers have the option of trying modern or ballet. Pre-kindergarten through first graders can learn violin through the ‘Suzuki method,’ which also involves parents and guardians, and older students choose between percussion and the clarinet. Theater arts started with basics like diction, improvisation and character work, and will culminate in the creation of a play based on students’ observations while riding the subway, to be performed for the school community.

CS 102 parents attended an informational session just prior to the launch of the after-

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A New Kind of Extended Family Keeps Siblings Together

Breaking up sibling groups can be an extremely traumatic part of foster care, especially when family reunification isn’t an option. Particularly with larger families, it often just isn’t possible for one foster family to take on all of the children. However, thanks to a team of two separate foster families, one group of seven siblings in our Foster Boarding Home (FBH) program has been able to maintain their relationships even as they transition into new families.

The Lopez children (not their real last name) were placed in foster care in 2006, when the oldest was 10, and the youngest was an infant. Originally, they were in kinship care; the older three were with a maternal aunt, and the younger four with a paternal aunt. Ultimately, both placements could not be sustained, and it also became apparent that the birth parents were

not going to be able to be reunited with the children. This might have been the beginning of the end of family identity for the two groups of Lopez children if not for the determination of their new foster, now pre-adoptive, families.

“I always wanted them to stay in contact with each other,” says Mary M, who is adopting the four youngest children, “It’s a big family, and I understood that when I took them in.” Mary and the foster mother who is adopting the three older children have worked together from the beginning to keep the children’s relationship alive, creating a ‘cluster home’ and a whole new extended family.

The families visit at least every other week, and the children also spend birthdays and holidays together. The two foster mothers use each other as babysitters, and have become very close.

“We talk on the phone nearly every day,” says Mary, “We’ve become like sisters ourselves.”

Research and experience underscore the importance of sibling bonds for youth with difficult backgrounds, who are often especially close due to the shared trauma and the parental replacement roles taken on by many older siblings in these situations. Adult separated siblings search for each other more often than for birth parents. Children have a much easier time adjusting to a new home and parents when their sibling relationships remain constant. The Lopez children are thriving with the combination of their new and old families, a source of great pride to Mary, who says “I feel wonderful being able to keep them together.”

ANNUAL BENEFIT 2008

On Tuesday, October 14th, Good Shepherd Services held its Annual Benefit dinner at Tavern on the Green. The event, which raised more than \$630,000 in support of our work, honored two longtime friends and partners in our work – Credit Suisse and Rob Shafir, and New York City Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs.

A highlight of the evening was the premiere of a new short film about our work entitled “Belonging,” which illustrates the many ways we help our program participants build stronger connections to their families, to their schools, and to the community. Creating connections, feelings of belonging, is fundamental to the work of all of Good Shepherd’s programs and is a powerful tool for change. The personal stories of the young people and families that are shared in the film are a testament to the success of this work.

Later in the evening, guests also heard from Moses Weah, a former resident of our Chelsea Foyer supported housing program, who shared his story of transformation with the guests. Moses described how he came to New York City after fleeing the civil war in Liberia, eventually ending up in a series of foster homes and juvenile detention

centers. Eventually, he found a safe haven in the Chelsea Foyer, where he was provided with the support he needed to go to school, maintain employment, and learn how to handle money. He was also matched with a mentor to help keep him grounded, “All of these things allowed me to become the person I knew I could be.”

Now Moses is pursuing a college degree and working for Good Shepherd’s LIFE Transitions program, which provides services to youth currently in detention and follow-up support to those same youth when they’re released to help them make better choices for the future. “I lived the life that many of my clients are on the path toward today and I am glad to have the power to positively influence them not to follow in my footsteps.”



Board President, James Sullivan (right) with Sr. Paulette LoMonaco and honoree Rob Shafir of Credit Suisse



Former program participant Moses Weah addresses the audience



Honoree Deputy Mayor Linda Gibbs



Guests sit down to dinner at Tavern on the Green

Photos: Joshua Zuckerman

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YOUR GIFT AT WORK

Matching Gifts

Many companies have a matching gift program. You can maximize your contribution to us by completing the appropriate matching gift form. Please log on to www.goodshepherds.org to see if your company matches gifts.

Workplace Giving

Direct your United Way contribution to Good Shepherd Services by marking **001138** on your pledge card. You will also find us listed in the campaign brochures of the State Employee Federated Appeal, the Combined Municipal Campaign, the Combined Federal Campaign and the CUNY Campaign for Voluntary Charitable Giving.

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Building Connections Through Horse-back Riding

at it makes her happy. A pair of siblings whose parents are Mexican immigrants have found the horses to be a way to connect with their far-away grandparents, since visiting their farm had been the only other time the children were exposed to horses.

The newest element of the Pony Club is the addition of teenage mentors: adolescents from the FRC who have been trained by GALLOP and now help supervise the younger children. The experience has been so positive that many of the mentors now go regularly to the stables to work with other children participating in GALLOP programs.

"The Pony Club really takes the children out of their normal element, which can be very helpful for them," says Susannah, "Some of them are extremely shy and nervous, and riding these gigantic animals really builds confidence." Julianna agrees, adding "These are kids that wouldn't talk, and now you see them socializing with each other, with different adults, with the mentors. It adds a whole other dimension to their life."



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The Arts Come Alive in a City School

school program, and they are clearly excited about their children having this opportunity. Many of the parents received arts education in the New York City schools when they were young, and keenly felt the lack in their children's schools. "They feel very blessed that their children have the chance to express themselves," said Program Director Chante Brown, "and they are amazed that we are able to provide the services and the materials, the instruments, paint, leotards, and so forth, for free. One parent said she wanted to transfer her other child to CS 102."

The students are even more excited than the parents. "This is all very new to them," says Chante. "They can't wait to be on stage, and they want to try everything!"

Holiday Gift Drive

Each year, more than 20,000 New Yorkers turn to Good Shepherd for help. We are working with more vulnerable youth and families than ever before, and as a result our need during the holidays is much greater. We invite you to take part in our Annual Holiday Gift Drive. There are many ways to help including adopting a family, collecting gifts at your office or school, and much, much more. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Desiree Torres at 212-243-7070, ext. 244.

ANNUAL FUND

Partner with Good Shepherd as we work to help young people build stronger connections to family, school and community. As reflected in this newsletter, we have been working to strengthen, deepen and expand our services so that more young people can be helped in making a safe passage to self-sufficiency. In these uncertain times, your support is all the more important, as we continue to serve as a model for other agencies helping vulnerable youth and families. Please consider helping us reach our Annual Fund goal by sending in your contribution today. Alternatively, you may donate online at: www.goodshepherds.org.